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FM AMEMBASSY QUITO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0697
INFO ENVIRONMENT SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY COLLECTIVE
WESTERN HEMISPHERIC AFFAIRS DIPL POSTS
RUCPDO/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHINGTON DC
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UNCLAS QUITO 000043

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: Ecuador: H1N1 Update

¶1. As of January 22, there were 2,251 cases of H1N1 reported in Ecuador, with 96 confirmed fatalities. The first H1N1 infection in Ecuador was recorded in May of 2009, and roughly 70% of the reported cases have affected people between the ages of one and 29. The disease is concentrated primarily in Ecuador's two most populous provinces: Pichincha, a largely mountainous province that includes the capital Quito, and Guayas, home of Ecuador's largest city of Guayaquil. The virus has also made its way into the more remote areas of eastern Ecuador, but poor reporting has made it difficult to gauge the severity of the problem. The Ministry of Health (MOH) believes the disease is now endemic within Quito and Guayaquil. The MOH believes H1N1 poses a low to moderate threat to the population. Although reporting standards vary between countries in the region, the available data suggest that the impact of H1N1 in Ecuador has been roughly on par with other Andean nations.

Confirmed deaths per million people (per www.flucount.org)

| | |
|---------------|-------|
| Ecuador | 6.84 |
| Colombia | 4.35 |
| Peru | 7.14 |
| Bolivia | 5.98 |
| United States | 35.28 |
| Mexico | 8.66 |

Government Action and Press

¶2. Recent efforts to combat the virus in Ecuador have been mostly confined to limited quarantine efforts and the targeted provision of anti-viral medication. The Government of Ecuador (GOE) has a website to educate citizens about H1N1, disseminate flu-related information, and inform health providers of the protocols for patients with flu symptoms (<http://www.msp.gov.ec>). A new laboratory recently opened in Quito to speed testing in the northern provinces; prior to December 2009 the only way to confirm H1N1 was to send samples to Guayaquil for lab work. Ecuador is currently waiting on a shipment of roughly 900,000 vaccine doses from the Pan American Health Organization for allotment to high-risk groups -- pregnant women, the chronically ill, and the obese -- expected in the first quarter of 2010. The vaccine was originally scheduled to arrive in November, and the MOH is currently planning for the final week of February/first week of March. Vaccine distribution to date has been essentially non-existent.

¶3. Media coverage of the H1N1 pandemic was common in the second and third quarters of 2009, peaking when President Correa's Chief of Security, Col. John Merino, died in September 2009 after a month of sickness. Ecuador's new Foreign Minister, Ricardo Patiño, who used to work at the Presidency, also became sick and was hospitalized in August 2009. Since then the focus on H1N1 has diminished. Press citations generally focus on the uncertainty surrounding the arrival date of the H1N1 vaccine.

Vaccine available at the Embassy

¶4. Embassy Quito received approximately 300 doses of H1N1 vaccine January 12. The H1N1 nasal spray and injection are available for U.S. direct-hire employees, their families aged 6 months and above, and LES staff. To date approximately 100 doses of the vaccine have been administered.

HODGES